UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

ROSEN COLLEGE

HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT





Interview Preparation Guide

From Classroom to Career: How to Best Demonstrate Your Professionalism and Skills

Successful Interviews

Your impeccable resume has caught the eye of an employer and an interview is arranged. Now is the time to verbally communicate your abilities and show that your skills will match those necessary for the job.

The interview process should be an exchange of ideas—a give-and-take of information between the interviewer and you. Prepare to talk about yourself and to ask relevant questions about the company and the specific position available.

Interview Guidelines

Do...

- Arrive 15 minutes early
- Dress appropriately
- Bring an updated resume and list of references
- Greet the recruiter with a firm handshake and a smile
- Make eye contact
- Ask relevant questions
- Read company literature *before* the interview
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the company and its products
- Listen to the interviewer
- Promote yourself in the best possible light
- Indicate your readiness to learn
- Project enthusiasm
- Send a thank you letter after the interview

Don't...

- Freeze or become tense
- Arrive late for the interview
- Criticize yourself, anyone, or anything
- Present an extreme (or sloppy) appearance
- Interrupt the employer
- Discuss past experience that has no relevance
- Act arrogant
- Discuss compensation until your final interview

Before the Interview

Step 1: Research the Employer

Recruiters report (again and again!) that students are not taking the time to research the position and organization before the interview process. Set yourself apart by gaining enough information and devising relevant questions for the employer that will create an exchange of ideas and allow you to connect your skills to those desired by the company.

There is ***absolutely no excuse*** in our technology-driven world for a student to fail to find information about a potential company. It's all at your fingertips—literally! Use the Internet to find company websites where you can read up on company awards, management, culture, and contact information. Websites such as *http://finance.yahoo.com* share many details of an organization's financial performance.

Use the guidelines on the following page to assist in your research of a potential employer.

Successful Interviews

Organization Information

- Name of recruiters/interviewers
- Recent mention in the news
- Others you know in the organization
- Potential markets, products, and services
- Competition
- Current stock price
- Growth potential
- Mission, philosophy, values
- Locations
- Company size (sales, number of employees)

Industry Information

- Trends
- Controversial issues
- Important people or companies
- Industry "buzz words"
- Salary information

Position Information

- Job duties/description
- Supervision involved
- Level of teamwork vs. individual work
- Training Procedures
- Professional development opportunities
- Amount of travel required

After collecting this information, spend some time developing a broad range of questions to ask the interviewer. Think in terms of the goals of this business, as well as management style, potential for growth, and opportunities for career advancement.

Step 2: Get to Know Yourself

Typically, a potential employer will focus on you for 60% of the time during an interview. Successful candidates prepare by getting to know themselves and being able to relate their qualities to the position. Interviewers will want you to use concrete examples to explain yourself. They are looking for comfortable candidates who can supply an answer for each question. Take time to analyze your academic, professional, and extracurricular activities to determine how they can illustrate your strengths, values and interests.

Examine your resume before entering an interview and be able to explain your accomplishments and experiences in detail. Consider actual events that occurred while on the job that could help to describe your skills and abilities and catapult you to the next level of your desired career field.

The *Adams Job Interview Almanac* shares twelve types of information that employers seek during an interview. Completing the following exercise will help you in answering nearly any question an interviewer may ask.

1. **Passion for the Business:** Why you want to work in this industry?
2. **Motivation and Purpose:** Why do you want this particular job at this specific company?
3. **Skills and Experience:** How will you use your previous skills and experience with this position?
4. **Diligence and Professionalism:** Provide key situations from your past that will demonstrate these characteristics.
5. **Creativity and Leadership:** Describe situations in which you used these traits.
6. **Compatibility with the Job:** How well do your experiences fit in with this position? What are you looking for from this job?
7. **Personality and Cultural Compatibility:** Describe your personality traits. Are you outgoing or shy? A planner or spontaneous? How does this fit with the corporate culture/potential colleagues?
8. **Management Style and Interpersonal Skills:** What kind of boss/colleague/employee will you be? Are you a team-player or prefer an independent working environment? Consider a leader that you admire and express how your style compares to his/hers.
9. **Problem Solving Ability:** Describe certain situations where you were required to resolve difficult issues. Accomplishments: When have you delivered more than what was expect of you?

Successful Interviews

10. **Accomplishments:** When have you delivered more than what was expecd of you?
11. **Career Aspirations:** How do your actual career aspirations align with this particular position? Which skills are you interested in developing?
12. **Personal Interests and Hobbies:** Are you involved with your community? How do you balance your time?

It is common for an interviewer to ask you to describe **difficult situations** or times when you have **failed.** Problem areas are normal and you should always prepare to discuss them if asked. To convey these situations in a positive light. always include what you learned from the event or how you intend to improve your skills based on your experiences. Never talk negatively about others or yourself — everyone makes mistakes—it is all in your wording and delivery!

Step 3: Practice and Prepare

It is vitally important to schedule a mock interview with the Career Services office. You can alleviate a substantial amount of stress by taking advantage of this dress rehearsal tool because it should help to alleviate the "nervous jitters" that can occur when walking into the unknown. Mock interviews can also help to improve your communication skills by identifying what you need to work on most. Do you use “nervous” words, such as "like," "um," "you know," and "uh"? Nervous mannerisms, including hand gestures, playing with your hair, and shaking your leg can also be controlled once you are aware of them. Finally, a mock interview will allow you to practice proper posture and facial expressions and increase your comfort level during the actual event.

The Appendix to this guide includes a list of potential questions that you may encounter during an interview. Reviewing these questions and rehearsing (not memorizing) responses to them will greatly increase your comfort level during an interview and alleviate the pressure you may feel.

While it may seem awkward to talk about yourself, it is imperative to strengthen your ability to do so in order to guarantee interviewing success. Practice with friends, in front of a mirror, or even on a tape recorder to become familiar with speaking clearly and in a positive light about your abilities. Also, remember that you may have to verbalize your weaknesses to a potential employer. The key to successfully expressing a weakness is to focus on limited job experience rather than personal limitations. Always explain how you intend to correct your weakness to portray it in a positive light.

Successful Interviews

Dress for Success

How important can it really be to wear the right outfit to an interview?

Extremely important!

Interview Attire Guidelines for Women

Pant or Skirt Suit

- Black, brown, navy or dark-grey color
- No extreme slits, necklines, or hemlines
- Tailored dress with a jacket is acceptable if both are a matching solid/subtle color.
- Skirts and dresses should hit at knee
- Clothes should be pressed!

Blouse

- Cotton or silk material
- Solid color suggestions: white, black, light blue, beige

Basic Pumps

- Slight heel (about 2 inches) or flats
- Shoe color should be the same as suit or darker
- No open-toe or backless shoes

Accessories

- Wear pantyhose
- Keep jewelry to a minimum
- Avoid dangling earrings, chunky necklaces, and noisy bracelets
- Subtlety is key: Conservative makeup and light or no perfume
- Attache with room for resume and personal belongings

Hair

- Clean, classic style that keeps strands away from your face
- If pulled back, use a professional looking barrette

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Interview Attire Guidelines for Men

Suit

- Black, navy, dark-grey with a 2-3 button jacket
- Suit should be pressed!

Dress Shirt

- Cotton solid, long-sleeved shirt, cleaned and pressed

Tie

- Conservative color
- Striped or quietly patterned

Shoes/Socks

- Polished dark leather dress shoes
- Socks high enough not to show skin when sitting

Accessories

- Briefcase or leather folder to carry resumes and a writing pad
- No fragrance/cologne, or light fragrance,

Successful Interviews

During the Interview

Shake Hands
Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake—never limp or bone crushing.

Active Listening
Open up your body language by leaning forward slightly to communicate your interest.

Posture
Sit up straight throughout the interview

Gestures
Do your best to avoid nervous giveaways such as tapping or shaking.

Maintain Eye Contact
Avoid a glassy stare and remember that it's OK if you break eye contact to think before answering a question.

Facial Expression
Don't let your face tense up, stay relaxed with a friendly smile.

Pace Yourself
Take your time to answer questions.

Relax
Attempt to sit comfortably without appearing stiff.

Grammar and Speech
Work at using proper grammar; do away with nervous, "filler" words such as "you know," "um," "like," and "yeah."

Tone of Voice
Speak clearly with a warm, well-modulated, confident and relaxed tone; slow your words down to avoid nervous chatter and control your volume.

Follow Up
Be proactive by asking for a business card from all of your interviewers to ensure you will have their contact information for thank you notes. Ask about the most appropriate medium for following up (phone contact, email, etc.).

Successful Interviews

Tell Me About Yourself

You can expect to hear these words at any interview—but when properly prepared, you can remain impressively calm and collected while providing a simple 90 second answer. This "ice breaking" exercise is yet another chance to sell yourself to the interviewer by highlighting your strengths and talents.

Briefly Explain the Following

- Educational Background
- Work Experience, Campus Involvement, or Community Involvement
- Strengths and Abilities
- Career Objectives

It will be over before you know it and you will have a strong start to your interview. Read through the following sample response for a better understanding.

Sample Response

I expect to graduate in May with a major in Events Management. During my college years, I have been very active with the Central Florida chapter of Hospitality Sales and Marketing International. Last summer I even interned with the marketing department at Sea World and gained invaluable practical, hands-on experience.

I have sharpened my research and planning skills while working on various community events with Sea World and have spent a great deal of time working one-on-one with the promotional department to brainstorm new concepts and ideas for reaching out to the wide array of tourism segments.

I love a good challenge and am extremely dedicated to my work. Also a self-motivator, I constantly try to learn as much as I can. For some time now, I have been watching your company grow and am incredibly impressed with your innovative approach to hospitality marketing and advertising.

Hopefully I can begin my career with your company and grow to become a true hospitality professional in the years to come.

The Star Technique

The STAR Technique is a way to frame answers concisely and completely. **STAR** stands for:

- **Situation** - discuss a situation or problem you have encountered.
- **Task** - share the task that the situation required or the ideas for resolving the problem.
- **Action** - tell about the actions you took or obstacles you overcame.
- **Result** - reveal outcomes, goals achieved, and lessons learned.

Sample Question: Tell me about a time when you feel you gave exceptional customer service.

Situation: While working for a catering hall, I was responsible for booking reception rooms for special events. Two weeks before her son's wedding, a mother called to cancel her reservation. The wedding was postponed due to a death in the family.
Task: This customer was obviously upset about these sad circumstances and I wanted to do as much as I could to ease her mind about the reception arrangements.
Action: I knew it wasn't too late to book another event for that room, so I checked with the manager regarding the possibility of refunding her deposit. We were able to return her full deposit, and I assured her that we could book another room for when her family was ready to make plans.
Result: The woman wasn't expecting to receive any money back and was pleasantly surprised that canceling the room wasn't impossible. My manger complimented me for taking the initiative with this customer.

Successful Interviews

After the Interview

After successfully completing an interview, you can continue to make an impression by properly following up with an employer.

- **Just Ask**
  Express your interest in the position by simply asking the interviewer what the next step should be.
- **Business Card**
  Ask your interviewer for a business card so you will have the correct contact information for your thank you note.
- **Thank You Letter**
  Always send a thank you within 48 hours to each person you interviewed with. Use the thank you letter to restate your interest and include any important or forgotten points.
- **Request Time**
  It is acceptable to request a period of time to consider any other offers.
- **Considerations**
  Make sure to carefully consider all aspects of the job before you accept an offer;. Remember that verbal acceptance is considered binding.
- **Take Notes**
  Use the interview as a learning experience and take notes after you are finished to help improve your skills.
- **Keep Searching**
  Regardless of how well your interview went, continue with your job search and contact as many other companies as possible. You do not have an official job offer until it is in writing.

Appendix A - Follow Up Letters

The “Thank You” Letter

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Name of Contact
Title
Company/Organization Name
Address of Recipient
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Ms., Mr., or Dr. (Contact’s Name):

Begin by reminding the interviewer of the position for which you were interviewed, as well as the date and place of the interview. Make sure to express your sincere appreciation for the time they spent with you.

Confirm your interest in the position as well as the organization. Express your strong qualifications for the job and tailor the requirements of the position directly to your talents. Be sure to mention anything you have done since the interview which would demonstrate your interest in the position. (This would include speaking with alumni or faculty, or completing any research in the field.).

Include any information not previously mentioned that could supplement your resume, cover letter, and the actual interview. Describe briefly how you would be an asset to the organization. Offer your phone number and confirm your willingness to apply to any conditions set forth by the interviewer.

If appropriate, finish your letter with a request for action. Restate your appreciation for their help. Offer a suggestion such as an additional interview.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Full Name

Appendix A - Follow Up Letters

The “Acceptance” Letter

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Name of Contact
Title
Company/Organization Name
Address of Recipient
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Ms., Mr., or Dr. (Contact’s Name):

I am pleased to accept the position of **[Position Name]** at **[Propertv Name]** in **[Location]**, at an annual salary of $ **[Amount]**. As we discussed earlier, I will be reporting for work on **[Start Date]**.

In the event that you need to contact me before **[Date]**, please note that I will be leaving the Orlando area on **[Date]** and can be reached at **[Phone Number]** from **[Date]** through **[Date]**.

Your consideration of my application and assistance throughout the interview process are greatly appreciated. I look forward to working with you and your staff and continue to be excited about my new responsibilities with **[Company Name]**.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Full Name

Acceptance Letter Tips

Include the following in your letter:

- Acceptance of the Offer
- Reference to salary, start date, and position title
- A list any travel or moving plans
- An expression of your appreciation and interest in joining the company

Appendix A - Follow Up Letters

The "Decline an Offer" Letter

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip Code
Date

Name of Contact
Title
Company/Organization Name
Address of Recipient
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Ms., Mr., or Dr. (Contact's Name):

Thank you for offering the position of **[Specific Position Name]** to me. I have decided, however, to accept a different position. It was a difficult decision to make, but I feel that at this time in my career path a different position will more closely fit my career goals.

I appreciate your willingness to share your time and information with me about **[Company Name]**. I learned a great deal about your company and perhaps would be interested in working for **[Company Name]** in the future.

I hope we will have the opportunity to meet again. I wish you success in filling this position.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Full Name

Decline Letter Tips

Cover the following in your letter:

- Inform company of your decision
- Thank interviewer for the offer
- Keep future prospects open
- Express sincere regret and appreciation for their efforts

Appendix B - Tough Interview Questions

General Questions

The following are common interview questions that can be tricky to answer. Prepare for your next interview by thoroughly thinking through each one.

1. **What is your biggest weakness?**
   Admit a weakness that might not be perceived by the interviewer as something that could hinder your job performance. Emphasize the action you are taking to correct the "problem." Do not say "None." If you can, put a positive twist on your answer. Example - "I wish I was bilingual, but I am currently enrolled in a Spanish class and am hoping to gain a better understanding of the language and culture.
2. **Where do you want to be In five years?**
   The interviewer wants to know if you are ambitious, if you can plan ahead and set goals for yourself. They could also be looking to see what your expectations are for the company.
3. **Why do you want to work for our company/in this industry?** Talk about information that you found through research. Reply with the company's positive characteristics as you see them and tie in the fact that you share their vision.
4. **Have you ever worked with a manager/professor who was unfair or just plain hard to get along with?**
   The interviewer is not looking to learn about your former supervisors, but more so the way that you speak about them. Do not answer in a way that could give the interviewer the impression that you have trouble getting along well with people or that you bad-mouth them and shift blame to others. Try to find a positive spin within a negative situation. Example - "Although I have been fortunate to have cordial relationships with most managers and professors, I did have one encounter with a very inaccessible professor. Whenever we approached him during office hours there was a sense that we were bothering him. The class worked around it though, and we turned to each other for help when needed and I learned to solve many problems on my own...which could have been his motive all along. He was a great professor and had many valuable lessons to teach, I just personally would have preferred him to be slightly more available to give direction when needed."
5. **What is your definition of success?**
   Be prepared to explain - in your own words - what you believe success to be. It can be helpful here to reference a person who represents your vision of success.
6. **What are your strengths?**
   Give the interviewer three adjectives or even examples of your strengths. Try to think of skills and abilities that can relate to the specific position or organization.
7. **Why should we hire you?**
   Think of what might set you apart from other candidates. Give examples of any work experience, special skills, or volunteer experience that you have.
8. **What do you find stressful In a job? How do you handle stress?**
   The interviewer is looking to see how you achieve a balance between your personal and professional life. Give specific examples of when you have been in stressful situations. Any situation you give should have a positive outcome.
9. **What is your Ideal work environment?** Be honest. Do you prefer an open or closed environment? Do you like working individually or on teams? What type of inter-office communication are you comfortable with?

Appendix B - Tough Interview Questions

Behavioral Questions

These questions require you to think about previous experiences and give brief details of past situations.

1. **Tell me about a time when you failed.**
   Demonstrate the ability to learn from your mistakes. It is important to show how you turned a negative situation into a positive one. The interviewer likely cares less about the actual situation and more so about how you answer the question.
2. **Tell me about a time when you worked on a team. How did the team go about achieving its goal?**
   Talk to the interviewer about the benefits of teamwork. Give a positive answer that addresses the challenges of working with others and how you overcame those challenges.
3. **How do you organize and plan for major projects?**
   Describe how you methodically prepare for class presentations or presentations you have had to give for student organizations and other extracurricular groups.
4. **Describe a leadership role you have assumed**.
   Tell the employer about a time when you were elected to a certain position, such as being captain of a team, voted to a student organization position, or a taking specific role with a volunteer organization.
5. **Recall a recent situation In which you had to motivate others**.
   This is just another opportunity to describe your leadership skills to an employer. It is a good idea to think of a few leadership situations you have been in before you enter an interview.

Resume-Based Questions

The interviewer will want to ensure that you can answer specific questions about the experiences listed in your resume.

1. **Tell me more about your Internship at [Company Name]**.
   Describe your most important accomplishments and give specific examples of your responsibilities. Also tell the employer about the impact that you had on your previous place of employment.
2. **Tell me more about your Involvement in [Club Name]**.
   Explain to the interviewer what motivated you to join that specific club and be honest if you are a passive member or if you have taken on a leadership role within some aspect of the group. Include anything you have learned or value gained from being a part of the association.
3. **Tell me about your previous supervisor/manager at [Company Name]**.
   Be able to quickly provide the name of your past employer and offer positive examples of their style. Keep in mind that it is a small world out there and there is always a chance that your interviewer will have a connection with your former employer.

Appendix B - Additional Questions

Additional Practice Questions

Read through the following questions and think of answers that you could provide. There is no way to know what specific questions you will encounter during an interview but just thinking through each of these is a great way to practice and prepare.

Questions About Yourself

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What does "service" mean to you?
3. Name three strengths and weaknesses.
4. What qualifications do you have that will ensure your success in this field?
5. Describe three things that are most important to you in a job.
6. What have you done since your graduation from college/since you left your last job?
7. How would a co-worker, friend, previous boss describe you?
8. What are your interests outside of work/school?
9. What qualities do you admire most in others?
10. How would you describe your own work style ?

Questions About Your Career Goals

1. What do you see yourself doing 1, 3, 4, or 10 years from now?
2. What type of position are you interested in?
3. What are your short/long term salary requirements?
4. How will employment with us contribute to your career plans?
5. What do you expect from a job?
6. What are your short/long term career objectives?
7. What are your location/travel preferences ?

Questions About Your Education

1. How does your education prepare you for this position?
2. What activities did you engage in at school?
3. What classes did you like the most/least at school and why?
4. Why did you choose the Rosen College?
5. Why did you choose your major?
6. Tell me about your academic strengths/weaknesses.
7. What have you read recently in your field ?

Questions About Your Previous Experience

1. What have you learned from past jobs?
2. What were the biggest pressures of your last job?
3. How did your job description change for your last job while you held it?
4. Why did you leave your last job?
5. What did you like most/least about your last job?
6. Whom may we contact for references?

Appendix B - Additional Questions

Questions About the Company or Position

1. Why should we hire you?
2. Why do you want to work here?
3. Why do you think you would like this position/company?
4. How long do you intend to work here if hired?
5. What do you think warrants a person's progress in an organization?
6. What interests you about our product/service?
7. How would you improve upon our product/service?
8. What do you think would be your greatest contribution to our operation?
9. How do you solve problems?
10. When can you start work ?

Behavioral Questions

1. How have you handled situations with upset/dissatisfied customers?
2. Tell me about a particularly tough problem that you had to solve and why it was so difficult.
3. Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
4. How would you motivate a poorly performing employee?
5. What is the biggest risk you have ever taken?
6. Give an example of a time when you did not back down in the face of adversity?
7. Tell me about an unpopular decision you have made?
8. When do you feel overwhelmed?
9. How would you handle it if a coworker complained to you about the company?
10. If a manager gave you ten things to do by 5pm and you realized there was no way to finish them all, how would you prioritize them?
11. Tell me about a time when you "bent" the rules and when it is OK to do so.

Questions You May Want to Ask

1. How would you describe a typical day in this position?
2. Can you describe your ideal candidate for this position?
3. What is the average stay in this position?
4. Outside of my department, who else will I work with?
5. How much evening or weekend work is expected?
6. How high a priority is this department within the organization?
7. What are the prospects for advancement beyond this level?
8. How does one advance in this organization?
9. How often do the training programs begin and what do they consist of?
10. Will you describe the company's philosophy to me?
11. What are the things you like most/least about working here?
12. Why did you sign on and why do you stay here?
13. If I am offered employment here, when would you like me to start?
14. What else can I tell you about my qualifications?
15. May I have a business card?
16. What is the next step of the hiring process?
17. When can I expect to hear from you?